

The Gospel For All People - part 1

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[0 : 00] As we get here to chapter 10, it's important to be reminded of the context in which the apostle Peter has been used. In chapter 1, if you recall, he led the disciples to select a new apostle in the place of Judas Iscariot.

He ultimately would be the de facto leader of the apostles, Peter would be, and there's a lot in which he is seen doing. As we continue in chapter 2, he preached the gospel on the day of Pentecost and saw over 3,000 people were saved and baptized.

Chapter 3, he healed the lame beggar and proceeded to preach the gospel. In chapter 4, he was arrested for preaching the gospel.

In chapter 5, there was the discipline, ultimate discipline of Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the Holy Spirit, which Peter had called them out on.

Also in chapter 5, he was arrested and preached the gospel. In chapter 8, we saw that he goes down to Samaria after Philip has preached the gospel down there.

[1 : 14] And he goes down with John and they affirm the fact that Samaritans are now part of the church. They are also partakers of the riches of the grace of God through the gospel.

And then he continued to preach the gospel in Samaritan cities and towns around. And then in chapter 9, we see that he goes up to a place called Lydda, about 15 miles or so from Jerusalem and preaches the gospel.

And he goes on to Joppa, about 10 miles beyond that. And would you know it, he preached the gospel there. So with Peter, it's kind of, you kind of know what to expect from him when he shows up in a text of Scripture, especially historically in the book of Acts.

With Peter, you're going to get the gospel. He's preaching it. He's a faithful preacher of the gospel. As I've already mentioned, that Joppa is located where he's at now.

So that's where we left him off. He's in Joppa, located about 35 miles from Jerusalem. Now that's substantial distance. For us in this day and age, 35 miles, I mean, it's still a decent amount, but it's not an overwhelming amount.

[2 : 33] But 35 miles when you have to walk or, you know, ride a camel or a donkey or whatever, that's substantial.

That's quite a ways, a couple days journey at least to get there. But he was, you know, you think of Peter, he's the, excuse me, no, he's based in Jerusalem, and his gospel ministry, his preaching of the gospel is extending out.

It's growing larger. And to find him, to see that he's in Joppa at this point is actually a, it's interesting.

Because Joppa is an important, is important in Old Testament history. You know why? Who else went to Joppa? Jonah.

Jonah embarked from Joppa while trying to flee from God. So at a time when God was calling Jonah to go to Nineveh to ultimately preach a message of repentance to Gentiles, Jonah wanted nothing to do with it, and he tried escaping, leaving from Joppa.

[3 : 48] Now, you know how that story ends for him, a stinky situation nonetheless. But, so he went to Joppa to avoid going to the Gentiles. Now, Peter is in Joppa having made his way up there just preaching the gospel as he goes, and one city to the next, he's kind of being taken along further and further away from Jerusalem, further away from home base.

And it's while he's in Joppa, we're going to see here in chapter 10 that he receives the call to go and take the gospel message, the message of repentance to the Gentiles.

And in the case of Peter, what's happening is Jesus is continuing to unveil his promise that he gave in Acts 1.8 when he said, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to

the end of the earth.

And he's fulfilling that. We're seeing that fulfilled through Peter. Starts in Jerusalem, moves out Samaritans. Now he's going to the ends of the earth. He's going to the Gentiles ultimately.

And as we read through this text in chapter 10, it's easy, like so much of me last few weeks, I'm like, Lord, what is it that we want to grasp from this text? What is it we can take?

[5 : 02] Because really, we can just read it verses 1 through 48 and let it stand as it is and just see how, you know, God uses Peter to bring the gospel to the Gentiles and ultimately how they're saved.

But I believe as we're reading through the text, there are some things we can pick up on ourselves as we consider this not just gospel to the Gentiles, but the gospel that Peter's been preaching is a gospel for all people.

And that's what we, that's the message we have. That's the message we share. It's a gospel, you know, to all people, Jew or Gentile, any, you know, color of skin, any station in life, status in life, any financial, whether they're financially prosperous or impoverished.

The gospel we have is for all people in all times, in all places. So let's look at how God prepares the soil for the gospel to spread to the Gentiles through the ministry of the apostle Peter and ultimately how he prepares the soil for the gospel to go out from his people today.

In Acts chapter 10, verses 1 through 8, first of all, we see that God prepares the sinner to hear. He prepares the sinner to hear.

[6 : 32] Let's read verses 1 through 8. At Caesarea, there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people and prayed continually to God.

About the ninth hour of the day, he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, Cornelius. And he stared at him in terror and said, What is it, Lord?

And he said to him, Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter.

He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him.

And having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. All right, so God is preparing at this point Cornelius.

[7 : 42] He has been preparing Cornelius in his life to hear the gospel. First, let's grab a little context for Cornelius here. He's in Caesarea. Caesarea is 65 miles northwest of Jerusalem.

It's about 30 miles north of Joppa. So you know what that means? Peter's going to be walking or traveling even further, twice the distance away.

And he'll be bringing the gospel to Caesarea. It's the Roman capital of Judea. And this event with Cornelius takes place about 10 years after Pentecost.

It's estimated it's about 10 years after Pentecost. And really, so why is it taking so long for the gospel to go out to the Gentiles, for the gospel to get to reach Cornelius in his household?

Well, first of all, I mean, if we're planning it right, we want it to go out to as many as possible, as fast as possible. But this shows that God's timing and plan do not align with ours.

[8 : 48] Actually, I should flip that. Our timing and plan on things tend to not align with God's. Right? So the transition, so, you know, first of all, it's a big deal.

The gospel, Jesus the Messiah, who has been killed and his blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. Now, that in itself is a shock to a Jewish individual, you know, growing up waiting and looking for the Messiah.

Now he's come and look, we've killed him. And, you know, the gospel is kind of a, it's a new message or a fulfilled message of prophecy. And then for it to go to the Samaritans and the Jewish mind was unheard of, right?

We already covered that. You know, when Philip went to Samaria and preached the gospel there, that's a big deal. Like, holy smokes, a Jew is talking to a Samaritan. Remember, that was the big deal in John 4.

When Jesus was talking to the Samaritan woman at the well, she said, why are you talking to me? You know, first of all, it's a man talking to a woman. The only time that ever happened in that culture was when he was propositioning her as a prostitute.

[9 : 52] And two is the fact that you're a Jew, I'm a Samaritan, you hate us. We don't get along very well. And so when the gospel spread to the Samaritans, you know, remember, you know, Philip was preaching.

He's just doing what he does. Philip's the evangelist. He's preaching the gospel, preaching the gospel, sowing seed, throwing it here, throwing it there. Then John and Peter had to come down. I mentioned that earlier. They had to come down and confirm, oh, yeah, I guess the Samaritans are also part of God's plan.

And that had to have taken some time to wrap their mind around. And now you're going from the Samaritans to the Gentiles. And so it's just gradually, it's extending out.

And so that's what's taking place. It's taking some time. You know, it takes time to walk there. It takes time to preach the gospel. And it takes time to catch up with God and the way he works things out at once.

And so we see Cornelius here. He's a God-fearer, right? He may be a synagogue adherent, but he's not yet a full convert to Judaism.

[10 : 54] And we know that because in Acts 11, he's referred to as the uncircumcised. So if he was a full proselyte, he would have gone through the process of circumcision. But Cornelius is a God-fearer.

And he did well to give alms, to give to the Jews, to pray regularly. I mean, his testimony is pretty amazing.

And he is ultimately serving as a bridge figure in a sense. He's standing at the boundary between Judaism and paganism. He's not quite a full Jew, a proselyte there, you know, because he hasn't gone through everything he was supposed to according to the law.

And yet he's not, you know, he's not following the paganism of the Roman Empire or, you know, other, whatever was the common practice or the common religion of the, in Caesarea.

He's living in a very Hellenized city full of Gentiles, but it was in the Holy Land itself. And Cornelius is an example of how religious a person can be and still not be saved.

[12 : 05] You know, he was sincere in his obedience to the law. He fasted, he prayed, he gave generously to the Jewish people. In every way, he was a model of religious respectability, yet he was not saved.

And that's something to keep in mind for ourselves is just because somebody looks the part doesn't mean they are. I've mentioned this, you know, I've mentioned this several times before.

I'll mention it, I'm sure, again in the future, is the fact that would you believe there are people who pastor churches who are not saved? That's a very true reality.

And that's, you know, in pastors, they tend to be guys who seem really religious. They really seem to look the part and seem to be doing, you know, what a good Christian or whatever is supposed to be doing.

But they don't know Jesus. They're not saved. And I read testimonies time and again of people who, you know, were training for ministry. And, you know, one that is big in my mind that I can think of off the top of my head, a guy's name is Todd Friel.

[13 : 13] I know I've shared some of his stuff before. But he went to, he was going off to school to train to be in the ministry. But he wasn't saved.

And by the grace of God, he heard the gospel. He was convicted and drawn to repentance and faith in Christ. So he recognizes that about himself. That's one guy who recognized it, whom God saved. How many are there out there who are not and think they are? Salvation is a divine work of grace. And God has to prepare a person to hear the gospel.

To prepare Cornelius, he sent an angel. To prepare any one of us. I don't know what all your stories are. I mean, he may have sent a preacher multiple times or a friend multiple times.

Or he may have had a gospel tract put in your hand a hundred times. Or maybe even just once. I don't know. It may have been a devastating event in your life that got your attention.

[14 : 15] For everybody who comes to Christ, it's different. Everybody has a unique testimony. Everybody has a unique story that they have to share, their faith story.

But God, ultimately, it is always God has prepared the soil of the heart to receive the gospel. And that's what he's doing here with Cornelius.

And we see in 1 Corinthians 3, verses 5-7, when Paul addressing this issue, the sectarianism that had overrun the Corinthian church, where people are like, I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of

whoever.

And Paul writes, he says, what then is Apollos and what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed as the Lord assigned to each.

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. God is the one who brings salvation to occur and happen in the life of an individual.

[15:23] But he uses humans, he uses men, men and women, to be the ones to bring the message, to sow the seed, to water it. God's the one who's bringing the growth.

You know, we talk about evangelists through history, Billy Graham, Billy Sunday, any other Billys out there? You know, Moody, whoever. And, you know, these people who preach the gospel and thousands getting saved, you know, well, yeah, they may have gotten saved.

But the fact is, God prepared the hearts of those people to receive the gospel and to respond to it. He just happened to use these individuals in that way to bring the gospel message and to see people saved.

Jesus made clear that God is already preparing people to hear the gospel. And that's something we need to take away from this today. We see it happening with Cornelius. We can see, oh, yeah, there's an angel that comes and talks to Cornelius.

I'm telling you right now, God's not working that way in everybody's life. He's not sending angels to all these households and like, you know, hey, by the way, you need to send to, you know, Sanford and go talk to this guy, Dennis Wilson.

[16:35] Bring him over and have him talk to you, you know, or go over to Springville and get Ian Robertson and bring him over to your house for a barbecue and let him hear what he has to say. God's not working that way, typically.

I've heard of occasions that he has, and maybe he has, and maybe he still is. But let me tell you what Jesus tells his disciples in John chapter 4, verse 35. He says, look, I tell you, lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest.

So he was telling his disciples, he says, look, you guys wait. You say, oh, well, four months until the harvest. I'm telling you, Jesus is saying, I'm telling you, look out there at these people that they were coming to Jesus at that time.

So people in their white robes, you know, the fields are white for harvest. He's saying, look, they are ready to hear the gospel. God is preparing the hearts of people. We need to be ready to go and share it with them.

God is preparing the soil of the heart of the person to hear. But not only is he preparing the hearer, but he also prepares the believer to share.

[17:46] Continue in Acts 10, verses 9 through 16. The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. And he became hungry and wanted something to eat.

But while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth.

In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him, rise, Peter, kill and eat. But Peter said, by no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.

And the voice came to him again a second time, what God has made clean, do not call common or unclean. This happened three times.

So we see here that Cornelius is not the only one needing to be prepared.

[18:49] Peter also needed to be prepared to share it. He has this vision of this sheet being lowered down out of heaven with a bunch of animals and reptiles and birds of the air.

The assumption is there's clean, there's unclean, probably mostly unclean on this sheet. And, you know, Peter grew up, growing up as an Orthodox Jew would know that he's not supposed to partake of these things.

But this isn't just a direct like, okay, you know, this is not a dietary law teaching that Jesus has with Peter. It has a broader application.

This is not about, you know, what Jews can eat and can't eat. It's not about, you know, Jesus saying you can have a hamburger or, you know, some pork ribs or something. But this is about Jesus saying, you know, this is what ultimately is the church.

Now, this sheet coming down out of heaven, this is representative of the church. You've got both what is considered clean and unclean. And, you know, in the law, there was a wall that divided Jews and Gentiles, right?

[19 : 58] Because Gentiles kind of did whatever their thing was. Jews had the law to guide them, dietary restrictions and all. And Jews considered themselves to be superior to Gentiles. And Gentiles were considered aliens and strangers.

That's why they had nothing to do with them. And so the clean and unclean animals represent the Jew and Gentile. The Jew is the clean animal. The Gentiles, the unclean. And as I said, the great sheet makes sense to be viewed as the church.

So the imagery conveys that Jew and Gentile are going to be mixed in the church. He's saying that they're all welcome. That they are all recipients of the grace of God through the gospel.

And through this vision, God was teaching Peter that he is the one who determines what is clean. God is the one who determines what is clean. He's the one who determines who is acceptable to be included in the church.

And though he doesn't know it yet, God is telling Peter that Gentiles will be recipients of the gospel and will be part of the church. God is preparing Peter to go to a people group that for his whole life he's been told have nothing to do with these people.

[21 : 07] They are strangers. They are aliens. They are dogs. We have nothing to do with Gentiles as good Jewish people.

So this experience with Peter ought to cause us to ask ourselves, at least it caused me to reflect, are there any unclean individuals in our lives?

Are there people that we can think of right now who we would not deem worthy to be part of the church? Are there people we can think of who we would deny hearing the truth of the gospel because of our prejudice against them?

I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand and share, yes, it's this person or that person. But I want you to reflect on that. You know, Peter, a Jew, grew up. Gentiles were off limits.

Forget it. They have nothing to do with them. Who's off limits to you? Who's either too, who's too far gone in your mind?

[22 : 20] Or who is too much of a disgrace to talk to and associate with? Are there people in your life that you can think of that you would say, I'm not going to even go to them.

I'm not going to bring the gospel to them. If your answer is yes to any of those questions that I had asked, then you have no other recourse than to repent of your sin and beg Jesus for mercy to soften your heart.

Peter would have gladly not had anything to do with Gentiles. But God prepared him for what he was about to do.

These three guys who show up at the door asking for him to come along. We need to pray that Jesus would soften our hearts.

That he would break our hearts for what breaks his. May he give us compassion for those who are living apart from his saving grace. May he give us a genuine concern for people who we see day in and day out.

[23 : 36] Maybe people who we consider our enemies and those who hate us or dislike us. And we can say, well, you know what? You're not going to like me. I'm not going to like you either. I'll just keep to myself.

May we be broken for those people. Arken Hughes has written, if we do not believe the gospel is inclusive, if we are not optimistic about what it will do, if we are not a little aggressive about sharing it, people will not come to Christ.

So let's pray, beg God to give us a softened heart, a heart of compassion for people.

And finally for today, in part one of this sermon, Acts 17 through 33, we see that God sets the appointment.

God sets the appointment. Acts 10 verse 17. Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate and called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was lodging there.

[24 : 56] And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, behold, three men are looking for you. rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation.

For I have sent them. And Peter went down to the men and said, I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming? And they said, Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.

So he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. And on the following day, they entered Caesarea.

Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him.

But Peter lifted him up, saying, Stand up, I too am a man. And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. And he said to them, You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation.

[26 : 20] But God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I asked then, Why you sent for me?

And Cornelius said four days ago, About this hour I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms have been remembered before God.

Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon a tanner by the sea. So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come.

Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord. We see in these verses that God sets the appointment between the one who is to receive and hear the gospel and the one who is to bring it.

He ordains the divine timing for just the moment the gospel is to be shared. Peter had no time to figure out the vision before Cornelius' men arrived, and God had to prep him to go with the men.

[27 : 37] Why? Well, the three men were Gentiles. So was Cornelius. And they're wanting him to come to the Gentiles' home. So being summoned by a centurion, that could be bad news for a gospel preacher.

We've already seen that the Jewish leadership and the heads of the religion there are carrying out persecution against the church.

We saw that with Saul, who became Paul. So maybe the Romans are catching on to this too. Who knows? Any number of thoughts could have gone through Peter's mind. Thus being prompted by the Holy Spirit, Peter had no other option but to go with the men.

That is an appointment set up by God. God prepared Cornelius. God prepared Peter. And now he's bringing them to a point where they're coming together. And Cornelius and his household and everybody invited, his friends, his neighbors, his other centurions.

I don't know who was all there. All we know is that people are gathered and Peter shows up and he's in a room full of Gentiles. But God arranged that appointment.

[28 : 47] One time there was a man that was walking across the street in Los Angeles and he saw a policeman and something said to him, I ought to witness to the policeman. But the signal was green.

He had to hurry. The guy was in the traffic pattern and he had to hurry along. But he thought to himself, no, no, that must not me. That must be me thinking that. God would never dream up something like that.

I couldn't get my mouth open in time to say anything to this guy. I got to hurry along. But then he thought to himself, but I would never think that myself, that I need to go and talk to this policeman here directing traffic or at the traffic spot.

That must be God. So the guy walked out in the street and he just said to the guy something to the effect of, do you know Jesus Christ is your Savior? And handed him a track.

And the big policeman, he looked down on him and he said, how did you know I had been thinking about that? That's divine timing.

[30 : 00] And that happens very often. It happens frequently where the receivers are prepared and in God's perfect time, the receiver's prepared and the sharer's prepared and in God's perfect timing, they come along.

That's how God operates. And like Peter, we must live our lives with spiritual sensitivity. Be aware when God appears to be leading you to engage with someone concerning their eternal soul.

In and of yourself, you're not likely to say to yourself, oh, I should go talk to that person. But if you feel the nudge, if you feel like, oh man, I really need to say something to this person, do it. Don't be shy. Say something. God may be preparing that person. You may be the person that God uses to bring that person to Christ to lead them to salvation. Or you may just be the first person to throw seed.

Or you may be used to, you know, after somebody's already put the seed of the gospel there, you may be used to water. You never know how God's gonna use you or how God's gonna use your witness.

[31 : 10] And it's not just one person who's going, it's not like one person goes out and, oh, they're winning all these people to Christ. I can't do anything. Don't ever say that. When you are faithful to share the gospel and you're faithful to share the truth of the word of God with people, God is the one who uses that for his glory.

It's not about you getting glory and recognition of look how great you are, look how many people you've saved and anything like that. God is the one who does the saving. God is the one who determines when people are ready and God is the one who draws them.

He just may be using you to plant the seed or water it a little bit. And praise God when you get to experience the harvest because of how encouraging that is. William Fay, who's an evangelist, said, non-believers must hear the gospel on average of 7.6 times before they receive it.

So if anyone walks away from you when you share the gospel with him, remember, the word of God never returns void. Dr. Graham Scrogey wrote, you can say no and you can say Lord, but you cannot say no Lord.

If he truly is our Lord, then we can only say yes to him and obey his commands and his leading in our lives. So let's pray. Let's pray for an awakening in our community.

[32 : 33] Let's pray that we are sensitive to how God is leading us and directing us. Let's pray that he'll give us a heart of compassion for those who do not know Jesus.

And let's pray for God to use us for his glory. Whether we see the harvest, the fruit of someone being saved, or if we're simply the person who's planting the seed or doing a little bit of watering. But let's pray that God will help us to be faithful to him. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for the life of Peter recorded for us here in Acts 10 and his experience with the Gentiles and how you prepared Cornelius in his home to hear the gospel, to receive it.

How you prepared Peter to share it, Lord, to tear down those walls of discrimination and hate.

And Lord, I pray that right here, right now, each one in this building, each one here within earshot, Lord, that you would break down our strongholds of hate and frustration and prejudice, Lord, that we would have hearts of compassion, that we would seek and truly desire your grace and mercy to be poured out on people no matter if they're considered a friend or foe.

[34 : 11] And Lord, most importantly, I pray that you would use us as faithful followers to share the gospel message and Lord, to be sensitive to how you're leading us to do so.

Because we don't know, Lord, how you're going to use our witness. You may bring somebody to know Christ, you may just be using us to plant the seed. Lord, but Lord, you don't call us to be fruitful in saving people.

You call us to be faithful in sharing the gospel, to go and make disciples of all nations. And Lord, we do that through your word and we trust you to work through it.